

Contact: Jenny Ouellette  
Associate Director of Media Relations and Communications  
[jouellette@spoletousa.org](mailto:jouellette@spoletousa.org) | 843.720.1137

Note: Imagery is available in the online media gallery.

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## Spoletto Festival USA announces expanded Orchestra showcase for 2023

*Three concerts highlight the acclaimed Festival ensemble with special guest conductors Mei-Ann Chen and Jonathon Heyward*

Ticket packages for the series are available Monday, December 5, 2022, at 12:00pm EST

**December 5, 2022 (Charleston, SC)** — In a preview to the full season announcement on January 27, today Spoletto Festival USA General Director and CEO Mena Mark Hanna announced programming for a three-concert orchestra series on June 5, 7, and 9, as part of the 2023 Festival. The concerts feature the Spoletto Festival USA Orchestra under the batons of three renowned conductors: Chicago Sinfonietta Music Director Mei-Ann Chen; Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Music Director Designate Jonathon Heyward; and John Kennedy, the Festival’s Resident Conductor and Director of Orchestral Activities. Orchestra series ticket bundles, starting at \$99 for a pass to all three concerts, are available beginning December 5 at 12:00pm EST at [spoletousa.org](http://spoletousa.org).

“During my first season as General Director in 2022, I was awestruck by the dynamism of our Festival Orchestra,” says Mena Mark Hanna. “The ensemble is widely considered one of the most prestigious orchestras of emerging virtuosic musicians in the world, although at Spoletto, they often play supporting roles in operas, dance, and contemporary chamber music. This Festival season, Spoletto will give their talent the spotlight they deserve.”

More than 80 instrumentalists will be chosen for the 2023 season ensemble through a nationwide audition tour. “The Festival is one of the most competitive programs for musicians in the United States, and offers rising talent the opportunity to perform an unusually diverse and exciting range of repertoire. We select

these promising musicians not only for their extraordinary technique, but also for their versatility and expressiveness,” says Kennedy, who has led the ensemble since 2011, and is himself a Festival Orchestra alumnus. Other notable Festival Orchestra alumni include conductor Kazem Abdullah; Ab Sengupta, Director of Artistic Planning at Carnegie Hall; Billy Hunter (trumpet) and Milan Milisavljević (viola), principal players in the Met Opera Orchestra; William Hudgins, principal clarinetist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra; and Beth Guterman Chu (viola), Allegra Lilly (harp), and Shannon Wood (timpani), principals of the St. Louis Symphony. In recent years, Festival Orchestra fellows have worked directly with a range of living composers including Helmut Lachenmann, Liza Lim, Huang Ruo, and Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels during last year’s world premiere of *Omar*.

Many of the approximately 1,500 Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra alumni credit their experiences at Spoleto as formative to their careers. Alumnus Blake-Anthony Johnson, the CEO & President of Chicago Sinfonietta explains that “learning amongst artists of all disciplines is a gift that I always carry with me.” Johnson, who performed five seasons in the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra continues: “I served as principal cellist personnel manager, created the Spoleto Orchestra Cello Choir, swam with dolphins, ate incredible cuisine, and performed countless world premieres. These experiences barely scratch the surface.”

Weston Sprott, a trombonist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and the Dean and Director of The Juilliard School’s Preparatory Division counts participating in the Festival Orchestra in 2003 as one of his fondest memories. “I particularly remember a stirring performance of Mahler’s 6th Symphony with Emmanuel Villaume. I still have meaningful friendships with many of the people who performed, even 20 years later.”

Vanessa Rose, Executive Director of the American Composers Forum, recalls first performing Leonard Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms* at Spoleto Festival USA as a member of the Festival Orchestra: “The entirety of that experience—from the music itself to the other musicians as well as the unique environment cultivated by the festival—cemented my lifelong adoration of this [piece] and so many others. I am eternally grateful.”

For the special 2023 Orchestra showcase at the Charleston Gaillard Center, guest conductors Chen and Heyward join Kennedy in leading the ensemble. Each program features powerful works that offer Festival musicians opportunities to demonstrate their artistic and technical prowess. *The Rite of Spring* opens the series on June 5 with Kennedy at the podium. On June 7, Chen leads a program featuring Dvorak’s *New World Symphony* alongside works by Florence Price, George Whitefield Chadwick, and Michael Abels. And on June 9, Heyward, a Charleston native who first began music lessons through the Charleston County Public School District, conducts a program of Hector Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* and Edvard Grieg’s

Piano Concerto in A minor, which features pianist Micah McLaurin as soloist. Additional concert details and information about each conductor follow.

Single tickets will be available beginning January 27, 2023. A limited number of passes offering a bundled ticket price to all three concerts are available beginning December 5 at 12:00pm EST. Details can be found at [spoletusa.org](http://spoletusa.org).

*Orchestra series passes must be purchased online at [spoletousa.org](http://spoletousa.org); they are not available by phone or in person. Passholders' seats are selected by the Festival and located in prime locations within the orchestra.*

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## Program and Conductor Details

### *The Rite of Spring*

Conducted by John Kennedy

June 5, 7:30pm

Charleston Gaillard Center

*The Rite of Spring*, Igor Stravinsky

(Additional pieces to be announced)

### **JOHN KENNEDY**

John Kennedy's history with Spoleto Festival USA began in 1983 as a member of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra. He conducted his first Spoleto opera in 2006 and has served as Director of Orchestral Activities since 2011. In recent seasons, Kennedy has conducted the Festival's world premiere of *Omar*, with music by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels, and the world premiere production of Huang Ruo's *Paradise Interrupted* (2015), as well as the American premieres productions of operas including *Émilie* by Kaija Saariaho (2011), *Kepler* by Philip Glass (2012), *Matsukaze* by Toshio Hosokawa (2013), *Facing Goya* by Michael Nyman (2014), *The Little Match Girl* by Helmut Lachenmann (2016), *Quartett* by Luca Francesconi (2017), and *Tree of Codes* by Liza Lim (2018). Kennedy also auditions and selects each member of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra through an audition tour in cities through the United States.

Outside of the Festival, Kennedy has led acclaimed performances and premieres worldwide of opera, orchestral, ballet, and new music. He is especially noted for his interpretations of contemporary music and has worked with many of the leading composers of our time in over 300 premieres and numerous recordings. He has designed and led many orchestral concerts integrating classic works with the new. Kennedy has recently guest conducted at West Edge Opera, Daejeon Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra 21, Singapore International Festival of the Arts, the Crested Butte Music Festival, and with many organizations including the Lincoln Center Festival, Other Minds Festival, sfSound, Talea Ensemble, Santa Fe Opera, and New York City Ballet. Kennedy is the composer of more than 90 works, including opera, orchestral, chamber, and experimental works that have been performed throughout the world. In 2022, his family opera *The Language of Birds* received a new production by Canadian

Children's Opera Company in Toronto, and he led West Edge Opera in the US premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's opera *Coraline*.

### *New World Symphony*

Conducted by Mei-Ann Chen

June 7, 7:30pm

Charleston Gaillard Center

*Ethiopia's Shadow*, Florence Price

*Delights and Dances*, Michael Abels

Jubilee from *Symphonic Sketches*, George Whitefield Chadwick

Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," Antonin Dvorak

#### **MEI-ANN CHEN**

Praised for her dynamic, passionate conducting style, Taiwanese American conductor Mei-Ann Chen is acclaimed for infusing orchestras with energy, enthusiasm and high-level music-making, galvanizing audiences and communities alike. Music Director of the MacArthur Award-winning Chicago Sinfonietta since 2011, Ms. Chen has been Chief Conductor of Austria's recreation - Grosses Orchester Graz at Styriarte since fall 2021 (following two seasons as the orchestra's first-ever Principal Guest Conductor), making her the first female Asian conductor to hold this position with an Austrian orchestra. She also serves as the first-ever Artistic Partner of Houston's ROCO (River Oaks Chamber Orchestra) a post she was named to in 2019 and this fall begins her new role as Artistic Partner with Washington State's Northwest Sinfonietta. Highly regarded as a compelling communicator and an innovative leader both on and off the podium, and a sought-after guest conductor, she has appeared with distinguished orchestras throughout the Americas, Europe, Taiwan, The United Kingdom, and Scandinavia, and continues to expand her relationships with orchestras worldwide (over 120 orchestras to date). Honors include being named one of the 2015 Top 30 Influencers by Musical America; the 2012 Helen M. Thompson Award from the League of American Orchestras; Winner, the 2007 Taki Concordia Fellowship founded by Marin Alsop; and 2005 First Prize Winner of the Malko Competition (she remains as the only woman in the competition history since 1965 to have won First Prize), and ASCAP awards for innovative programming.

### *Symphonie Fantastique*

Conducted by Jonathon Heyward

June 9, 7:30pm

Charleston Gaillard Center

Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 16, Edvard Grieg

Featuring Micah McLaurin, *piano*

*Symphonie Fantastique*, Hector Berlioz

(Additional pieces to be announced)

### **JONATHON HEYWARD**

Jonathon Heyward is forging a career as one of the most exciting conductors on the international scene. He currently serves as Chief Conductor for the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie in Germany and is the Music Director Designate of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, beginning his five-year contract in the 2023-24 season. Heyward's recent guest conducting highlights include appearances with the Royal Opera House in London, The London Symphony, and BBC Symphony, as well as with illustrious orchestras in Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In the United States, Heyward recently conducted the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC, which was followed by debuts with Atlanta, Detroit, San Diego, and St. Louis Symphony Orchestras. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Heyward began his musical training as a cellist at age 10 and started conducting while still at school. He studied conducting at The Boston Conservatory, where he became assistant conductor of the prestigious institution's opera department and of the Boston Opera Collaborative and received postgraduate lessons from Sian Edwards at London's Royal Academy of Music. Before leaving the Academy, he was appointed assistant conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, where he was mentored by Sir Mark Elder, and became Music Director of the Hallé Youth Orchestra. His debut with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain at the 2021 BBC Proms earned five-star reviews and was hailed by *The Guardian* as "an unforgettable showcase of high-energy collaboration." Heyward is deeply committed to education and community outreach work and is renowned for imaginative concert programming.

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### **SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA**

Spoletto Festival USA was founded in 1977 by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who sought to create an American counterpart to the annual Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, that he had founded in 1958. Now approaching its 47th year, Spoleto Festival USA is internationally recognized as America's premier performing arts festival. For 17 days and nights each spring, Spoleto Festival USA fills Charleston's historic theaters, churches, and outdoor spaces with performances in opera; theater; dance; and chamber, symphonic, choral, and jazz music. Spoleto's mission is to present programs of the highest artistic caliber while maintaining a dedication to young artists, a commitment to all forms of the performing arts, a passion for contemporary innovation, and an enthusiasm for providing unique performance opportunities for established artists. Beyond its role as a launching pad for young talent, Spoleto also serves as a catalyst for cultural change and has aided in Charleston's flourishing as a top arts and culture destination. With General Director and CEO Mena Mark Hanna at its helm, the 2023 season takes place May 26 to June 11 in various locations on the downtown peninsula. Spoleto Festival USA is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

**Images:** A selection of high-resolution images can be found in Spoleto Festival USA's online gallery. For more information, visit the [press room](#).